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ABSTRACT

The Kanawha County textbook controversy of 1974 sparked profound changes in the American political landscape and American education. The roots of this controversy go back to the 1960's, when drug use, women's liberation, violence, and sex education convinced conservatives that America was in moral decline. Parents in Kanawha County fingered school textbooks, with their secular humanistic approach, as major transmitters of this social decay, and 12,000 people petitioned for the prohibition of school literature which questioned God, the family, or the American political and economic systems. This incident has had far-reaching repercussions. Conservatives have realized new power. The New Right has formed around the issues of the Kanawha County petition, two of its major concerns being educational control and curriculum content. This movement has affected classroom teaching through censorship and a return to basics and rote learning. Teachers are increasingly cautious about method and content. By channeling its children into Christian academies and questioning compulsory education and the use of federal funds, the New Right threatens the future of public education. However, ominous as this may seem, the efforts of the New Right can have a positive effect on education. The controversy it has raised should be used by all educators to re-examine the American educational system. (LP)

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Understanding the New Right and Its Impact on Education

by

Joe L. Kincheloe

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The Kanawha County Textbook Controversy and the Emergence of the New Right

The Kanawha County textbook controversy in 1974 (See fastback 63, *The Battle of the Books: Kanawha County*) raises some of the most complex questions of any event in recent educational history. In Kanawha County the nation witnessed a collision of values between those who believe that parents have a right to determine what values their children will be exposed to and those who believe the curriculum should reflect the social, cultural, and racial diversity in the nation. What is the role of parents and the family in determining a child's education? What is the role of the state? Questions like these, which emerged from the textbook controversy, transcend education and have relevance for a number of societal institutions.

The Kanawha County textbook controversy set the stage for some profound changes in the political landscape and in American education. Out of it emerged the issues that would concern the various conservative groups known today as the New Right. Before the 1974 protests, conservative and fundamentalist parents sensed that they were powerless. They saw themselves as victims of a liberal, morally decadent larger society that had left behind their old-fashioned attitudes about religion, morality, and social behavior. The success of the anti-textbook forces in Kanawha County gave conservatives around the country a new sense of confidence. They could control their own destinies and stop the tide of perceived immorality that threatened to engulf their children.

Armed with this new confidence, fundamentalist parents challenged school boards in all sections of the country. The American Library

Association documented a dramatic increase in textbook controversies in the years immediately following the Kanawha County episode. These challenges, with a few exceptions, were led not by irrational extremists but by conservative, reasonable people operating from a philosophically consistent position. A dominant theme in the battles was the right of parents in a democratic society to control what is taught in their schools. In most cases the issues surrounding the controversies were quite similar to those in Kanawha County, thus proving the contention of school board member Alice Moore, the wife of a local Church of Christ minister and leader of the anti-textbook coalition, that Kanawha County was not just an "isolated community," as it had been portrayed on television and in the newspapers.[1]

In just a few short years the movement had gained so much momentum and influence that presidential candidate Ronald Reagan was pledging to support many of the goals of the protesting parents. Reagan strategists recognized the political benefits to be derived from support by the New Right and encouraged their candidate to court the evangelical constituency. By the end of the primary campaign in 1980, Reagan had promised to support the teaching of the Genesis account of creation, to maintain a tough foreign policy toward atheistic Communism, to fight the anti-family ERA, to use the presidency to denounce humanism in the schools, to protect the tax-exempt status of politically motivated, right-wing fundamentalist Christian pressure groups, to return America to the basic Christian values which made the country the model for the rest of the world, to endorse tuition tax credits for parents who sent their children to private schools, to return back-to-basics education to our schools, and to support the concept of parental rights in education. Thus, the protesters no longer sensed political isolation. To the contrary, they perceived that they were in the vanguard of political change as America moved into the 1980s.[2]

The Kanawha County controversy alerted the New Right as well as many other Americans to the power of the television medium, including its power to distort the truth. Alice Moore watched with great consternation as television reporters and other journalists entered Kanawha County on the prowl for the spectacular. According to Moore, the media portrayed the conflict as a class struggle between the rich ur-

banites and the poor coal miners. The worst distortion, Moore argued, was the common depiction of Kanawha County as a "unique little spot in America" riddled by a controversy that was uncommon to the rest of the nation. In the first place, she contended, the differences of opinion in the county were not that great. The vast majority of Kanawha citizens, maybe 95%, agreed that the texts were inappropriate for use in the schools. Secondly, the county was not drastically different from many other areas in America. Moore's claims have a degree of validity when the school board election returns for 1976 are examined. She was re-elected by the largest majority ever received by a school board candidate and carried all districts in Kanawha County – both city and county.

Moore argued that not only did the media distort the fundamental issues underlying the textbook controversy and portray her as an inconsistent and emotional censor of such works as *Jack and the Beanstalk*, but it was the power of television that helped create the moral climate which initiated the controversy in the first place. She stated, "Television has been the greatest moral disaster this country has ever known," and she claims it has done irreparable damage to the home, family, and general moral stability, because young people are exposed to decadent attitudes and opinions that never entered the minds of children a generation ago. Television, she continued, made the sick and perverse acceptable by making it appear presentable. Moral relativism crept into our schools and the thinking of our teachers via the broadcast medium. Once established as acceptable in the eyes of our leading educators, it found its way into our textbooks.

Alice Moore may have felt helpless to combat the power of the media in 1974, but it was not long before the New Right began to stop viewing television as an enemy and decided to make it a friend. Possibly the greatest success of the New Right following the Kanawha County textbook controversy has been their sophisticated use of the media for their own benefit. The conservative media offensive operates on two fronts. One front is concerned with influencing the content of the so-called secular media. The second front involves the production of their own programs that address social issues and politics as well their own brand of theology. On the first front, New Right organizations such as the

Clean Up TV Campaign, the National Federation for Decency, Morality in Media, and the Coalition for Better Television have used economic boycotts against businesses that sponsor "immoral TV programs." The boycotts or the threat of boycotts published in such periodicals as *Broadcasting Magazine*, *Variety*, *Advertising Age*, and *Wall Street Journal* have had an impact on the content of network programming. In the 1982 network television season, substantial changes were occurring in the content of prime-time programs. Action-adventure series took the place of sexually oriented material, and the number of family-oriented dramas significantly increased. According to the editors of *TV Guide*, the trend for television in the first half of the 1980s seems clear: "sex is out, law-and-order is in."

In the fall and winter of 1981-82, the Coalition for Better Television added a new strategy to its campaign to remove "immorality" from television. Using methods once employed by the civil rights movement, the coalition attacked TV for discrimination – discrimination against Christians. In a letter to network executives, the chairman of the group charged that TV "has excluded Christian characters, culture, and values" from its programs. Too often, the letter continued, when Christians appear on TV, "they are characters only to scam, prompt revulsion, and to ridicule." If this "secular supremacy" does not end, the Coalition for Better Television will support a boycott against the products of advertisers who are a party to "this ugly anti-Christian bigotry."

On the second battle front, the New Right has established a widespread network for disseminating their political and educational doctrines. The Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), the PTL Club, Jerry Falwell, and other evangelists who can afford to purchase TV time have begun to assert their influence not only in the theological sphere but in the social, political, and educational realms of American life as well.

These crusaders have mastered the use of the media and use Hollywood techniques to promote Protestant fundamentalism and right-wing politics. Their pronouncements on education consistently call for a return to the basics. Like their brothers and sisters in Kanawha County, they challenge parents in the name of God to fight the anti-Christian, anti-American influences that hide under the name of secular

humanism and cultural diversity. From their sophisticated TV studios they tell their viewers that secular humanism has become the "establishment religion" in our public schools, and, as a result, teachers unwittingly teach acceptance of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, and alternative lifestyles. The phrase "alternative lifestyles" is merely, they claim, a euphemism for old-fashioned perversion.

Although there is debate concerning the exact figure, the media evangelicals claim that their TV audience includes more than 50 million viewers. During these broadcasts fundamentalist preachers routinely assail the evils of Keynesian economics, federal welfare programs, and alternative lifestyles. Jerry Falwell's media empire has grown so dramatically in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that it employs almost 1,000 loyal followers and operates with an annual, tax-free budget of 56 million dollars. In just a few short years Falwell's popularity has eclipsed such evangelical celebrities as Billy Graham and Oral Roberts. His organization, the Moral Majority, has become a household world.

Many factors have contributed to Falwell's spectacular rise to stardom, not the least of which is his recognition that the audience to which evangelists in America appeal like their men to be men – macho, if you will. Falwell unabashedly relishes the macho virtues and uses "manly toughness" better than any fundamentalist preacher since Billy Sunday. To shouts of "amen" from his Thomas Road Baptist congregation, Falwell proclaims that "Christ was a he-man." Using metaphors based on sports, the military, and authoritarian leadership, Falwell has created a following who eagerly contribute money and time to his right-wing causes. Falwell, through his Moral Majority, has not only influenced national policy but has become an international force with world-wide influence. For example, in June of 1981 when Israel bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Baghdad, one of the first people Prime Minister Menachem Begin telephoned was Jerry Falwell. Evidently, it was the prime minister's perception that Falwell commanded one of the most powerful forces in American politics.[3]

The Right Reacts

The Kanawha County controversy had its roots in the reaction to the perceived social and educational changes of the 1960s. Obviously, thousands of Americans did adopt changing values and lifestyles during the Sixties, but their influence on education was not significant. American teachers have tended to be conservative and still tend to be conservative – the changes of the 1960s did little to change the nature of the teaching force. However, the liberal civil-rights and anti-war movements, especially with the media coverage extended to them, convinced the citizens of Kanawha County and many other areas in the country that liberalism was out of control. Psychedelic drugs were causing young people to engage in all types of perverse behavior, and sex had moved from the bedroom to the streets, they claimed. Studies indicate, however, that the 1920s was the period of great change in American sexual behavior.[4] Like so many other aspects of social change in the Sixties, the revolution was a modification of attitude, not behavior. This new, more open attitude and frank discussion of sexuality ultimately led to calls for sex education.

Sexual frankess in films, books, and the mass media and the subsequent sex education movement alarmed Kanawha County parents and other conservatives around the country. Sex education represented the extension of the new promiscuity to children and the loss of the rights of parents to protect their children from the "immoral" changes taking place around them. It was the introduction of sex education into Kanawha County in 1969 that first induced conservative parental organizations and people like Alice Moore to enter the political arena.

Soon Moore was running for the county board of education on a platform that called sex education an outside attempt to bring "a humanistic, atheistic attack on God" into the classroom. She easily defeated an incumbent school board member and rapidly succeeded in removing sex education from Kanawha County schools. With her election came not only the demise of the sex education programs but the establishment of a forum for an articulate spokesperson of the political right. Moore quickly became a powerful advocate of parental rights in the region and, as a result, gained a devoted following in both Kanawha County and the City of Charleston. From her election in 1970 until the advent of the textbook controversy in 1974, Moore united the parents who were fearful of sex education and governmental interference in any aspect of their children's moral education and kept them aware of forces in the country thought to be insensitive to such concerns.

It is not surprising that the roots of the Kanawha County textbook controversy are entangled in the sex education controversy. In the textbook disputes following Kanawha County, sex education has commonly been the subject that spawns parental objections. In a majority of cases, parents claim that sex education not only undermines the traditional family unit but it results in increased sexual activity among students. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the American Library Association reported that half of the documented parental efforts to remove materials from schools concerned sex education literature.

Thus, as the world made its way into the homes of the conservatives through their television sets, they became upset by the depiction of changing sexual mores, women's liberation, gay rights, black power, and crime in the streets. There was no doubt in their minds that the nation was experiencing a moral decline and their lives and the lives of their children were under siege. In many ways this siege mentality fits quite neatly into right-wing historical patterns – the type of pattern historian Richard Hofstadter has labeled "the paranoid style." In this paranoid mentality, feelings of persecution are common and are manifested by charges of conspiracy. These conspiracies have been traditionally concerned with the takeover of the nation, the destruction of democratic freedoms, and the perversion of social and moral values. According to some members of the New Right, the conspirators added a

new element to their scheme in the 1960s – the takeover of the public school system.

At their most extreme, members of the New Right see a vast plot involving the abortionists, zero population growth advocates, secular humanists, planned parenthood organizations, and especially the sex education promoters who seek to use schools as a conduit for achieving their common goal – the teaching of genocide to young people. These zealots argue that the secular humanists know that by the year 2000 the world will have to limit its population. Therefore, abortion, contraception, homosexuality, suicide, sterilization, and euthanasia will be necessary to limit population. And, so the argument goes, the humanists in the schools will try to make these practices appear respectable.

Pat Robertson, the host of the 700 Club, agrees to a point with his more zealous brethren. While he doesn't propose a plot that fits together as neatly as do some other evangelists, Robertson does agree that the schools teach genocide. One example he often cites to support his contention is the social studies program developed in the late 1960s known as *Man: A Course of Study* (MACOS). This program was designed for upper elementary school children, using the general theme, "What is human about human beings?" The program begins by contrasting human behavior with the behavior of various animal species. Then the course turns to an examination of a culture quite different from middle-American culture, that of the Netsilik Eskimos. Robertson claims that the course obviously teaches evolution, but even more importantly it condones the practice of senilicide (the deliberate killing of old people as a way of limiting population) through its study of the Netsilik. Robertson describes in detail the portion of the course that tells about the Netsilik practice of placing their elders on ice floes and sending them out to the sea to die. "They actually took axes and cut off their hands as the old people tried to keep from floating out to sea," the preacher passionately tells his TV audience. From Robertson's perspective MACOS obviously is part of the secular humanist conspiracy to justify population control, be it by abortion or by killing old people. He then points to the decline in test scores and increasing promiscuity and violence as a result of this secular humanism which entered the schools during the 1960s.

Robertson does not stand alone. Phyllis Schlafly, anti-ERA crusader

and founder of the conservative Eagle Forum, writes that "Secular Humanism has become the Establishment Religion of the U.S. public school system." It *alone*, she maintains, has brought about declining test scores and the growing problems of discipline. Secular humanism *alone*, she continues, has caused "the public schools to eliminate prayer, moral training and the teaching of basics."[5]

Alice Moore and the parents of Kanawha County saw secular humanism infiltrating their schools first through the textbooks and then slowly from textbooks to the minds of their teachers and students. They wanted the schools to serve as a moral anchor that, along with the church, could provide continuity and certainty in troubled and confused times. In order to insure that the schools remained true to traditional fundamentalist principles, over 12,000 Kanawha County citizens signed a petition and presented it to the school board in 1974, calling for a prohibition of literature that encouraged skepticism in the following: the family unit that comes from the marriage of a man and woman, belief in God, the American political system, the free-enterprise economic system, the laws and legal system of the nation and the state, the history of America as "the record of one of the noblest civilizations that has existed," respect for other people's property, and the need for study of the traditional rules of grammar. The petition also stated that special care should be taken to guard against the teaching of agnosticism or nihilism in the classroom.

The Right and the Left: Some Surprising Parallels

Ironically, the New Right protesters have raised the same questions that some liberals were asking: Who controls education? Do parents have to send children to school to be exposed to values they do not accept? Liberal parents Peter and Sue Perchemlides removed their child from the Amherst, Mass., public schools, citing deep philosophical differences with the system. They claimed that as parents they had a right not to expose their children to a school experience that was contrary to their code of ethics. The case went to court and in December 1978 the superior court judge ruled in favor of the Perchemlides, saying that "parents have rights further than those explicit in the Constitution, among them, the right of parents to educate their children in the manner they choose."[6] Home education advocate John Holt sees similarities in the arguments of religious fundamentalists and liberal critics of education. He refers to both groups as "deschoolers" and emphasizes the right of fundamentalist and liberal parents to control the education of their children.[7]

Fundamentalist conservatives do not want their children exposed to anti-Christian or anti-American ideas in school. In 1974 Alice Moore pointed out that her rights as a parent were violated when school exposed her children "to values clarification or various rap sessions with the intent of making them more open-minded than I want them to be on religious and moral questions." Schools, she said, have no business get-

ting involved in these areas. In 1979 Moore made her position even more explicit:

> I believe in indoctrinating my children. I start with a basic assumption that God exists. Concerning my children's rearing I am doctrinaire, dogmatic, and dictatorial. I do want them to be open-minded in areas where God hasn't spoken. God is right – everything else is wrong. You can be very open-minded where there is room for opinion.[8]

Open-mindedness, Moore argues, is not some inviolate concept that every educator has the duty or even the right to encourage. Often, especially in cases involving fundamentalist Christians, the promotion of open-mindedness at school and the rights of parents collide head-on. In such cases the rights of parents, she argues, take precedence.

Some liberal parental rights advocates have serious misgivings about exposing their children to the competition, materialism, and success ethic that, they argue, are common characteristics of the public school environment. Many assert their parental prerogative to prevent the public schools from programming their children into preordained slots in the mainstream adult society. Liberal parents speak of the role the education system plays in "molding people to fit society," "the lockstep routine," and "the dominant cultural ideology that comes across in the hidden curriculum."

From the perspective of some liberals, this "dominant cultural ideology" prepares young people for a dehumanized, technocratic, capital-intensive society. It is a society, the argument goes, where lives are regulated by the clock, people are subservient to large institutions and are under the domination of faceless technocrats. Children's minds in this dehumanized society are stunted by the formal education system and the society at large. In the end, the liberal left argues, schools serve simply to promote a passivity and submissiveness that leads young people to accept the dehumanized, technocratic society.[9]

Regardless of motivation, both the left and the right reject the concept that parents have no right to determine the education of their children. Though coming from different positions, the fundamentalist Christians and their arch-enemies, the activists of the 1960s (many of whom are the leftist parents of the 1980s), are working for the same

goals. School administrators, pressured by fundamentalists and the liberal dissenters as well, can no longer be cavalier about the question of parental rights. The New Right, bolstered by the successes of the Kanawha County protesters, has challenged the authority of school officials throughout the country; and neither they nor the liberal left defer to professional educational opinion on matters of curriculum content or instructional methods. Parental rights, both sides argue, will actually foster academic freedom, because teachers in private schools or home schools would be totally free to teach whatever philosophy the school advocated, from Protestant fundamentalism to atheism, from free-enterprise economics to socialism.

Since the common school crusade of the 1830s and 1840s led by Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, the idea of schooling for all has become part of the American ethic. But the upsurge of the parental rights movement has challenged the historical American consensus on universal public education including the idea of compulsory education.

There are diverse ideological justifications for compulsory education. One of the most persistent views, from the time of the common school crusade to the present, has come from individuals who see schools as a social balance wheel. Educators from Horace Mann in the 1840s to Arthur Bestor in the 1950s to the "new" Neil Postman of the 1980s contend that schools should play a conserving role in the society, transmitting a common package of knowledge, which is periodically adjusted, to keep a diverse social order in balance.

Another ideological justification for schooling has revolved around a belief in individual liberation. Advocates of this position argue that man in a natural state is good, but the conventions and artifices of society have always corrupted him. The individual liberationists from Rousseau to A.S. Neill (whose book *Summerhill* exerted a great influence on American educators) to John Holt (before his home education phase) saw schooling as a place where a child's natural qualities could be nurtured and not subjugated to the concerns of adults.

A third justification for schooling has come from the social reconstructionalists from Robert Maclure and the utopian reform movements of the 1830s to George Counts in the 1930s to Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in the 1960s and 1970s. All of these in-

dividuals saw the school as a vehicle in a larger program of radical social change. Through the schools students would be alerted to and provided solutions for the social injustice that pervades American society.

Still another persistent justification for schooling has been to train technicians for a technical society. From this technocratic perspective schools are viewed as institutions to prepare people required by the technocracy. Since the Industrial Revolution, educators from Clarence D. Kingsley, champion of the efficiency movement in education in the early twentieth century, to James B. Conant of the 1950s have sought to use the schools to serve the needs of the American technocracy.

Though they may have held different visions of what constituted the "good society," most Americans have supported the once radical concept of universal schooling. In the 1970s and now in the 1980s this belief is under siege, not merely from a lunatic fringe but from reasonable spokespeople from both the left and the right. The lessons of Kanawha County have convinced many of the fundamentalists that universal public education may no longer be appropriate for a diverse society.

During the midst of the controversy Alice Moore argued that the Kanawha County language arts textbooks' emphasis on the racial, cultural, and philosophical diversity of American society was "anti-Christian, anti-American, anti-authority, depressing, and negative." Others, she admitted, may not view the textbooks in this light, but for Alice Moore and her constituency the books threatened the basic moral assumptions by which their children were raised. Since no state institution has the right to challenge these parental rights, Moore sees universal compulsory education in a diverse society, which is unable to agree on the meaning of morality, as impractical. She therefore calls for the end of publicly supported schooling and advocates in its place a free-enterprise system of education that would give parents a range of choices concerning where, how, by whom, and for what purposes their children would be educated. Thus, a segment of the public that has historically supported the public school as a conserving, tradition-transmitting institution has withdrawn its support.

Other former advocates of public schooling have questioned the ability of the institution to create their vision of a good society, and as a result, some of these have withdrawn their traditional support for public

education. In the last two decades there has been a slow erosion of faith in public education from liberals of various perspectives. While education has prospered in the twentieth century, violence and destruction have failed to disappear. In fact, some historians have argued that the twentieth century has been the bloodiest century in human history. They remind us that Germany, one of the most highly educated societies, produced the concentration camp and the human oven. Others point to the Kennedy administration's brain trust of Ivy League intellectuals as the architects of the Vietnam War.

Still others have lost faith because they feel the public school is too oriented toward the technocratic society. Scientific and technical knowledge, they say, is only one portion of human potential, and schooling that concentrates on this type of knowledge neglects that which makes us human. The technocrats who emerge from such an educational system cannot see beyond the workings of the technology they are trained to operate. These "educated" people are engaged in technologies which will ultimately destroy the planet, such as strip mining, nuclear power plants and weapons, agribusiness farming techniques, plastics, and dangerous chemicals. The alternative for many who are disillusioned with technology is to desert the technocratic school system.

Those whose intellectual roots are in the tradition of individual liberation have frequently deserted the public schools in the last 15 years. They argue that children are naturally curious and truly want to learn and explore. Without adult coercion they can exercise their eager and hungry minds and learn in a natural manner that will enhance their abilities to remember and apply that which they have learned. In the repressive atmosphere of public schooling the chance of avoiding adult coercion is quite slim. Therefore, they argue, students must be taken out of the schools and educated in a more natural environment. The innate interest and curiosity that most children possess are a far better basis for motivating learning than the rewards and punishments now used by the public schools.

Those who would advocate the use of the schools to promote social change have also lost faith in the ability of schooling to accomplish such goals. The American faith in education to solve the nation's social,

political, and economic problems remained firm for over 200 years. Since the last decade or so, however, many liberal advocates of social change no longer see the school as the builder of the new social order. For the social reconstructionalists social change through schooling has become an empty promise – schools seem merely to enhance the social status of those groups already in power. If true social change is to occur, they argue, it must come from outside the school in the larger society.

Indeed, Americans of all ideological stripes have lost faith in public schooling, but the conservative trend of the 1970s and the early 1980s has even called into question the idea of compulsory education. This conservative skepticism, reflected so clearly in the Kanawha County controversy, has subsequently found expression in the refusal of conservative communities to pass school referenda. On the national level the conservative tide has slashed federal support of all levels of education. Every federal student-aid program has been cut as have research grants in all academic disciplines.

As advocates of the New Right have called not just for the reduction of governmental financial support but the actual elimination of public education, organizations like the NEA have become much more vocal in their support of universal compulsory education. Spokespersons for the NEA see the New Right assault on public education as the most serious threat to public education in recent history. The NEA claims that public education is not atheistic as portrayed by the New Right but is rather "non-theistic" as required by the Constitution. The public at large has so far not been able to distinguish between non-theistic and atheistic. The NEA contends that in order to save the concept of public education, it must clarify the important distinction between the terms in the public's mind. As one NEA spokesperson puts it, "We are fighting like hell to save our public schools."

Judging from the growth of private schools (particularly fundamentalist Christian schools) NEA has quite a fight on its hands as it attempts to defend the concept of public schooling. Regardless of political persuasion, parents often hold the belief (as documented by recent Gallup polls on education) that they have little control of education. The polls also point out that parents feel that in recent years even teachers and administrators have little control of public schools. As a result, more and

more parents are choosing to send their children to private schools. Since 1963 the number of Christian private schools operating in this country has quintupled. Add to this the large numbers of liberal parents who have removed their children from the public schools to be educated at home or in liberal private schools and one gets a sense of general abandonment of public education.

The Christian school movement of the New Right has used the publicity generated by fundamentalist preachers on TV to further its cause. In the late 1970s, expenditures for TV ministers jumped from 50 million dollars to 300 million dollars, and by 1980, 90% of all religion on TV was on commercial channels, and most of it is controlled by right-wing fundamentalist groups. The five-fold increase in Christian schools and the recent actions of some state legislatures to remove state standards requiring certified teachers in private schools have been gained through the publicity of evangelical TV ministers and parents like Alice Moore.

These New Right victories in the state legislatures resulting in the removal of certification standards have already benefited various other groups and organizations. Liberals are finding it much easier to set up alternative private schools and to remove their children from the public institutions so they can be educated at home. In a recent interview American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means said that the successful effort of fundamentalist Christians to remove state certification standards for private schools in South Dakota had made it much easier for his band of Lakota Sioux to form a private school in their Black Hills encampment. Means is using the opportunity to recruit uncertified staff to teach traditional Sioux values and alternatives to Western industrialized society in the geodesic dome which serves as the school.[10]

The fundamentalist's drive to revoke certification standards for their private schools has benefited the effort of Ivan Illich and John Holt. Illich, whose book *Deschooling Society* serves as the foundation of the liberal private school movement, is quite optimistic concerning the future of voluntary, private learning institutions. His educational future includes neighborhood resource and skill exchange centers and information networks that would provide access to the archives of technology,

science, languages, and the arts. Holt, in championing home education, argues that the public schools are "not reformable, and that education is best done not intentionally . . . but incidentally, as part of living." Holt is buoyed by the fundamentalist-won court rulings revoking certification standards, and in states that still require state certification of private school teachers, he and other individuals sympathetic to the cause have set up organizations to provide information and legal advice for parents who wish to remove their children from the public schools.

As different as the reasons for the opposition to public education may be, both John Holt and Alice Moore face the same criticism of their efforts. Both the liberal home educator and the fundamentalist Christian have come under attack from teachers and administrators who have a personal stake in the "$100 billion-a-year compulsory education industry." Often the most vehement objections to Holt's and Moore's crusades have come from the NEA and various teacher organizations. On a recent morning talk show originating in Boston, the president of the Massachusetts Teacher Association emotionally shouted down a couple of fundamentalists by saying, "What you are doing is evil, pernicious, and pervasive. And don't you dare preclude any citizen in this country from making his or her own choices."

Another criticism of the private and home school movements is the charge of elitism. Moore takes this criticism in stride, but Holt with his roots in liberalism is quite sensitive to it. Holt's home education and private school network has been called elitist in that it appeals to a highly educated class of intellectuals. When faced with the charge that poor people may find it impossible to teach their children themselves, Holt argues that less affluent families can send their children to the homes of other people for cooperative family education; and couples who work can call in a private tutor. Not surprisingly, Holt's ideas have found little acceptance within minority communities traditionally denied equal access to public education.

Alice Moore dismisses charges of social class bias in Christian private education. Questions of possible social class stratification along economic lines are answered with the argument that people concerned with problems of equality are basically scared of freedom. Moor admits that there might be some stratification but denies that such layering

would be a problem. "Both wealthy and poor people would choose religious schools," she maintains, for religion recognizes no class or racial lines.

An important factor contributing to the growth of private fundamentalist schools in the early 1980s has been the support of the Reagan administration and the cadre of conservative congressmen elected in the 1980 elections. Honoring his campaign promise, Reagan has pushed the concept of tuition tax credits for parents who send their children to private institutions. Demonstrating to the New Right that his heart was in the right place, the President ordered in January 1982 the Internal Revenue Service to restore tax-exempt status to certain Christian schools, which had been denied it 12 years earlier because of their racial segregation policies. The action created a storm of controversy from civil rights advocates and was a source of considerable embarrassment to the Reagan administration. Subsequently, the U.S. Supreme Court in May 1983 upheld the denial of tax-exempt status. The New Right was infuriated by this reversal after having been so pleasantly surprised by the original presidential order to the IRS to change the 12-year-old policy and allow the exemptions. Regardless of the outcome surrounding status for racially segregated private schools, many analysts claim that with the help of the Reagan administration and congressmen supported by the New Right, "private schools are hot."

Diversity in America: Roots for Controversy

Has the diversity within post-Vietnam American society rendered public education impractical? Alice Moore answers the questions with a resounding, "Yes." Furthermore, the leftist proponents of private education argue that the diversity in American society is the philosophical cornerstone of their alternative approaches to education.

Before examining the implications of diversity on educational policy, it is useful to analyze the types of diversity common to American society. In the last half of the twentieth century, the term diversity has become synonymous with racial differences to the exclusion of other forms of diversity. Unfortunately, the various types of diversity were overlooked in the Kanawha County controversy and continue to be overlooked by many educators.

American diversity is complex and exists on many levels. For purposes of discussion, diversity in American life can be organized into four fundamental categories: political, economic, psychological, and moral/philosophical.

Political diversity in American society may be viewed along a continuum with liberalism at one end and conservatism at the other. Historically, liberalism was associated with the view of protecting the individual from the power of institutions, namely the church and the state. Over time that tradition has been modified so that by the latter part of the twentieth century in America, liberalism has become associated with experimentalism toward social institutions and social ideals. The role of the state, the liberal maintains, is to insure that all

persons have the freedom to experience the benefits of their inalienable rights.

Conservatives have held that improvement in the human condition must come from within the individual, and the basis for morality originates from within. Conservatives also believe that individuals with the desire to improve the quality of their life can do so, despite environmental deprivations, without the interference of government. However, conservatives have been quicker to accept religion as a force for ameliorating the human condition than has the liberal.

Economic diversity in American society may be viewed as a continuum with laissez-faire capitalism at one end and socialism at the other. Historically, very few Americans have embraced pure socialism as an economic alternative for American society. The majority of Americans tend to fall between laissez-faire capitalism and welfare-state capitalism. Simply stated, laissez-faire capitalism involves unrestricted economic activity with no governmental interference with the production and consumption of goods, or restrictions on profit making. The desire to satisfy material needs is what makes capitalism work and is the main characteristic of this economic system, which, it is argued, is the best guarantee of human freedom. The socialist is offended by the disparity of wealth which he believes capitalism tends to produce. In order to avoid the economic inequality, socialists advocate governmental ownership of productive resources.

The majority of Americans accept capitalism, but many have serious concerns about many aspects of it. The major differences Americans hold concerning economic philosophy revolve around the question of how much freedom is desirable in the market place. The welfare capitalist advocates a restricted market, with governmental action to insure equal economic opportunity. He believes in governmental protection of the rights of trade unionism, the manipulation of money and credit depending on the state of the economy at a given time, and the dismantling of monopolies to ensure a free economy.

The psychological diversity in American society has often been overlooked in the formation of social and educational policy. Traditionally, social analysts have emphasized the political and economic differences between Americans, but by the 1950s sociologists such as

David Reisman, William H. Whyte, C. Wright Mills, and Floyd Hunter argued that deep psychological divisions exist that transcend political and economic differences.

Psychological diversity in American society can be viewed on a continuum with the inner-directed individualism of the Protestant ethic on one end and other-directedness on the other. Although exceptions exist, the drift of twentieth-century America has been toward a conformist, other-directed society. The other-directed person defines himself on the basis of the judgments of other people. He shifts the responsibility for his success or failure away from self to the organizations of which he is a member, whether that be society at large, his peer group, or the corporation.

The other-directed individual has accepted the conformity dictated by the social hierarchy of the organization. His standards are determined by the group, the corporation, or the media; and the basis for status comes not from that which he produces but from his ability to win the approval of others. The other-directed man is dependent on institutions beyond his control for approval, for his goals, for success, and ultimately for the meaning of life itself.

The inner-directed individual places great emphasis on individualism. Capitalism is valued because it emphasizes personal choice and initiative, both important characteristics to the inner-directed person. The inner-directed person is often bound by tradition, but unlike peasants in a feudal state or members of tribal cultures, he is more aware of himself as an individual. Performance is more important than status. Home and family are fundamental; life revolves around the extended family rather than around society at large. The inner-directed person finds companionship and security in his home and feels no compulsion to cultivate numerous friendships and social relationships outside of it. The most important quality of the inner-directed person is discipline, which is reflected in terms of devotion to hard labor and seriousness of purpose.

In spite of his protestations of individualism, the inner-directed person closely conforms to societal roles and expectations imposed by twentieth-century bureaucracy, the corporation, and the mass media. While the societal forces toward other-directedness are overwhelming, it

is revealing that the most recent protests against it have come from the leftist counter-culture emerging in the 1960s and the relatively inner-directed New Right of the 1970s and 1980s.

A myriad of philosophical/moral positions exist in our society, but the one that creates the most diversity of views revolves around the concept of "truth." On one end of the continuum are those who believe that there are absolute moral truths, while on the other extreme are those who assert that truth is limited by experience and circumstances. These opposing positions are commonly labeled as moral absolutism and moral relativism.

The moral absolutist, who holds that truth exists and humans are capable of finding it, insists that the world is rational and orderly, that truth as found in human experience is revealed by an Ultimate Intelligence who establishes the criterion for distinguishing truth from falsity. This moral absolutist accepts the existence of timeless moral laws. What is true now has always been true and what is moral now has always been moral. In no situation will the definition of truth and morality be subject to change. For the moral absolutist human existence has a purpose, which is the constant struggle to identify the good and to uphold that which is good.

The moral relativist holds that definitions of morality are subject to change depending on the nature of the situation. Values are not universal; they must always be viewed within a context. Cultural anthropology has demonstrated the variations in ethical systems; what is valued in one culture at a certain time may be viewed as perverse or evil in another setting. Human experience continually is confronted by moral dilemmas for which previous experience may not be able to provide a "right" answer. As a result, it is impossible to know for certain if we have made the correct moral decision. The life of the moral relativist is one of uncertainty; to treat human existence otherwise, he argues, is simply to fool oneself with mindless answers to complex problems.

When the NEA panel examined the roots of the Kanawha County controversy in late 1974, they identified several categories of diversity as causal agents: social class, rural-urban, religious, and cultural value differences. The panel made no attempt to analyze the specific tensions produced by these categories of diversity, other than to make vague

references to liberalism and conservatism. Attention given to the many expressions of diversity may have yielded more insight into the roots of the controversy.

Careful examination would have alerted the NEA investigators to the fact that the controversy was not a rural-urban fight. Alice Moore was a middle-class mother from suburban Kanawha County. Her initial core of support came not from the rural coal mining portion of the county but from the middle- to upper-middle-class suburbs. The real divisions in Kanawha County were focused around the categories previously delineated: political, economic, psychological, and moral/philosophical.

Most observers recognized the political and economic (not social class) distinctions between the textbook protesters and supporters. With some exceptions, the majority of the protesters were political conservatives who agreed that governmental attempts to improve the quality of the individual's life were misguided. They argued that individuals, with the help of God, could improve their condition on earth and that the best method of improving their earthly condition was through free-enterprise capitalism. In the economic sphere the majority of the protesters viewed governmental intrusion with great suspicion. Remember, the petition signed by 12,000 protesters presented by Alice Moore in July of 1974 included free-enterprise economics as one of the eight principles that the schools should teach.

More significant, however, were the psychological and moral/philosophical differences between the anti-textbook and pro-textbook groups in Kanawha County. Most protesters with few exceptions were inner-directed individuals with deep roots in the Christian tradition, whose lives centered on the home and family. One factor that contributed to the intensity of emotion involved in the Kanawha County protests and to New Right issues in general was the perception that the home was under siege. These parents also expected that their locally controlled school would reinforce the values of the home, teach strict discipline, and monitor and reward individual performance. When these inner-directed parents perceived that the school was no longer locally controlled, was lax in its discipline, and more concerned with compensating for rather than rewarding achievement, they were moved to ac-

tion. When similar controversies emerged in other communities since Kanawha County, these same psychological factors were present. In fact, they represent the foundation of the New Right's protest against modern American society.

Also essential to an understanding of the social divisions exhibited by parents in Kanawha County and subsequently by the New Right is their philosophical perspective concerning moral truth. Textbook protesters invariably were moral absolutists who insisted that truth can be discovered through God and the Scriptures. Truth is never changing, never dependent on circumstance, and is never hard to understand once an individual devotes his life to God. In the words of Alice Moore, "God is right – everything else is wrong." Therefore, debate over the curriculum is unnecessary. According to Moore and subsequent New Right critics of education, that which is godly should be included, the ungodly should not; and the *true* Christians will know the difference.

Take, for example, the debate over moral absolutism and moral relativism as it relates to the New Right charge that secular humanism pervades the curriculum. One of the most influential tracts written on the subject, *Secular Humanism and the Schools* by Onalee McGraw, argues the point that the lack of belief in God has led directly to lower test scores and the decline of quality in American public education.[11] The only solution, McGraw argues, is to eliminate secular humanism from the schools, by law if necessary. In 1975 John B. Conlan, Jr., congressman from Arizona, introduced a bill that would have eliminated federal financial support for all courses that purportedly taught secular humanism. The legislation passed the House but was killed in the Senate. Conlan was successful, however, in ending funding for the National Science Foundation-sponsored program, *Man: A Course of Study* (MACOS).

Since 1975 the anti-secular humanism attack has intensified. Grassroots organizations have sprung up all over the country. In the state of Minnesota alone, observers say that over 300 community groups have been formed. Such organizations reject any compromise when the subject is moral issues. As Texas textbook reviewers Mel and Norma Gabler have stated, there is no room for flexibility when it comes to morality in education.

Another curriculum issue in the Kanawha County protest was the treatment of racial and ethnic diversity in American society. In the debate over the inclusion of black or other minority literature in textbooks, Alice Moore and her corps of supporters claimed categorically that they were not racists. But, when one examines the list of authors who they accused of corrupting the basic values of Christian parents, it included: Gwendolyn Brooks, Dick Gregory, Eldridge Cleaver, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Malcolm X.

Alice Moore claims that the reason black authors are so often excluded from her curriculum is not because they are black but because so many black authors do not accept the moral/philosophical positions that Mrs. Moore and her supporters see as inviolate. In addition, Moore contends that most attempts to teach interracial understanding have actually generated race hatred. Therefore, she suggests, the schools should ignore the question of ethnicity and concentrate on the inculcation of Americanism. Furthermore, realistic presentations of ghetto life deal with topics that Moore and the New Right do not want taught to their children. They maintain it is a denial of parents' rights to have their children exposed to lifestyles of which they disapprove.

In her defense, Alice Moore attempted to discourage the flagrant race hatred that seeped into the Kanawha County controversy, but the practical outcome of her efforts to protect her moral standards has been to exclude treatment of minorities in the curriculum.

The New Right's Impact in the Classroom

The Kanawha County experience and the subsequent organizational efforts of the New Right have made teachers fearful of undertaking innovative teaching approaches or of dealing with content that might be considered controversial. The back-to-basics mentality in education has experienced widespread growth as the result of New Right activism.

Basic education from the perspective of the New Right involves far more than a renewed emphasis on the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. It is also a politically and economically conservative movement based on moral absolutism. The basics education that has drawn support from the New Right values strict morality and discipline, man defined in terms of his productivity, and the sanctity of traditional definitions of the family. Yet the world for which the student is educated is characterized by a corporate mentality, a success ethic, and status based on the approval of peers.

Although New Right values embrace inner-directedness, the motivations used are designed for an other-directed society. The teacher assumes a dominant role as purveyor of knowledge, granter of permission, and bestower of rewards. Students learn to accept future roles based on social class. Dress codes are advocated and hair styles are regulated. Measurable mechanical skills of communication and computation receive top priority; conceptual and independent thinking are not encouraged. The "well-adjusted" student is one who accepts the status quo and rarely questions the purpose or policy of our social institutions.

The new-found power of the New Right is also beginning to have an impact on teaching methodology. Some teachers have been quite surprised when New Right organizations have accused them of undermining the family when they use "show and tell" and other common elementary discussion techniques, which are labeled as "invasions of family privacy" or "underminers of family authority." Role playing has been labeled as "sinful" by some fundamentalist parents. In a recent incident in Connecticut, teachers who conducted gravestone rubbing as an art/social studies project were charged with teaching students to "commune with the dead."

In many areas of the country, biology teachers are being advised not to teach evolution if they want to keep their jobs. A number of anti-evolution groups have been established since 1970 in order to disseminate the creationist viewpoint. One of the most influential is the Creation Science Research Center in San Diego, California. Its administrator, Kelly Segraves, confided in a recent interview that fundamentalists want "50 percent of the curriculum and the content back. We want 50 percent of the tax dollar used for education to our point of view. We have a lot to undo. Creation/evolution is only the beginning."[12] In response to the creationists, Kenneth S. Saladin of Georgia College told his colleagues in the American Association for the Advancement of Science "to quit being afraid for your jobs. Take a stand on principles you know are unassailable. Get involved in a war you are now losing."

Many educators claim that the censorship efforts of the New Right reported in the news represent only a small part of the curricular impact of fundamentalist organizations. Many teachers, frightened by the prospect of parental controversy, simply self-censor their content and methodology. Class discussions and reading assignments that might involve controversial areas are simply not as common in the politicized climate of the 1980s as they were a few years ago. Teachers become wary of broaching a subject that may evoke community wrath.

More visible are the efforts of specific New Right activists to purge the curriculum of unwanted components. Mel and Norma Gabler started a textbook review service in their home in Longview, Texas, over 20 years ago. Since their humble beginnings their organization has

grown into a worldwide operation with a mailing list of over 12,000. Reviewing 50 or 60 textbooks a year, they highlight objectionable passages and send their reviews to the Texas textbook selection committee. Over two-thirds of the books to which they have objected in the last few years have been rejected by the committee. This makes the Gablers a powerful national force because Texas constitutes such a big market for textbook publishers (48 million dollars in yearly sales in the late 1970s) that they tailor their products for the Texas market. As a result, Texas textbook decisions help determine the content of school books sold all over the nation.

The Gablers are on the lookout for sexual education materials and English textbooks with "dirty words" and bad grammar. Their real passion, however, is social studies texts with unpatriotic or anti-capitalistic positions. In an interview in the fall of 1981, Mel Gabler discussed a history text that alluded to the bad temper of George Washington. Both he and Norma considered such a comment in a textbook as unpatriotic and challenged its authenticity by stating they could find no evidence in any encyclopedia to prove it. During a recent television interview the Gablers revealed that their labeling of an American government text as "unpatriotic and biased toward Communism" rested on the fact that it contained a list of characteristics of a Communist government "near the front of the book." When asked why such placement made the book "Communist inspired," the Gablers contended that students learned about Communism before they had read about their own system of government.

This fear of political and economic subversion in textbooks and curricula in general is a consistent thread in the New Right's educational perspective. In the last decade, for example, school systems and state legislatures, often under pressure from the New Right, have substituted free-enterprise economics classes for the old survey of economics course. Of course, one cannot always judge the content of a course from its name, but many of the free-enterprise courses have been designed to fit the spirit of the New Right and unabashedly indoctrinate students in matters of economic policy.

A student sitting through many of the free-enterprise classes would rarely hear of the existence of poor people in American society. From

the New Right's perspective it borders on anti-Americanism to intimate that there may be times when the interest of rich people and poor people are in opposition. As Alice Moore has intimated, social studies exists to create patriotism and that means teaching respect for free-enterprise economics. "If that means indoctrination, then so be it."[13] She also implies that studies of poverty are too often undertaken to promote socialism.

Jerry Falwell sees a direct correlation between fundamentalist Christianity and free-enterprise economics. In his opinion, laissez-faire economics is clearly outlined in the Book of Proverbs. His Liberty Baptist College in Lynchburg, Virginia, offers a good example of the teaching of New Right economics in unfettered conditions.

In a recent article, Frances Fitzgerald described a Liberty Baptist class where students asked laughingly, "if there were really people who believed in socialism." The professor answered, "Fourier, Blanqui," and then on the board wrote, "thesis, antithesis, synthesis." She later added, in response to a student who asked who these people were, that they represented the dictatorship of the proletariat. Fitzgerald's observation of classes at Liberty Baptist College sounds hauntingly familiar to my own observations of free-enterprise high school classes around the country:

> At the Liberty Baptist Schools, students are protected both from information and from most logical processes. There is no formal ban on logic, but since analytical reasoning might lead to skepticism . . . it is simply not encouraged except in disciplines like engineering, where it could be expected to yield a single correct answer. . . . In anything resembling human affairs, the intellectual discipline consists of moving wordsticks and word facts from one pile to another with the minimum coefficient of friction.[14]

The Christian Liberty Academy in Prospect, Illinois, was founded in part to oppose the alleged "creeping socialism" of the public school curricula. Founder Paul Lindstrom, an enthusiastic supporter of New Right causes, demands that his students learn strict morality and free-enterprise economics from kindergarten to the twelfth grade. In their economics classes, students sit through lessons that advocate a return to the gold standard – on biblical authority. The teachers quote Isaiah

1:22 to support their case. "Thy silver has become dross, thy wine mixed with water."

There is no doubt that the New Right has made an impact on the content and methodology of the classroom. The New Right learned in Kanawha County what the New Left had learned years before – organization is a key to success. Textbook publishers, for example, have admitted that they have had to yield to organized New Right pressure groups and avoid publishing material that might be construed as unpatriotic, anti-capitalistic, or anti-Christian.

If the success of the Kanawha County protesters did nothing else, it alerted Americans to the basic philosophic divisions in our society. The protesters and their New Right brethren believe that our nation is in crisis and close to cultural breakdown. In light of such a dire outlook, their reaction is not surprising.

The success of the organizational efforts of the New Right has instigated a liberal counter-attack. The New Right has demonstrated its expertise in the use of media to mold public opinion. In the near future New Right evangelists plan to expand their TV budgets to sponsor such projects as a large number of slick, syndicated fundamental religious programs transmitted by satellite to cable systems; syndicated news programs with a right-wing perspective; prime-time gospel commercials on the three major networks; and Sunday evening religious programs for commercial TV. To counter this influence of the New Right, TV producer Norman Lear organized People for the American Way in 1980. The organization has produced TV ads aimed at encouraging cultural diversity and tolerance of different opinions. Lear says that People for the American Way is designed to answer the New Right broadcasters who imply that individuals who fail to agree with their views on education, abortion, the ERA, and other issues are un-American and anti-Christian. People for the American Way and other liberal organizations such as former Senator George McGovern's Coalition for Common Sense as of now are hardly threats to the well-financed New Right and pale in comparison to the professional organizations of the Falwells, the Pat Robertsons, and the Jim Bakkers.

Other anti-New Right organizations are increasing the counter-attack. Sixty-one prominent scholars recently issued a statement called

A Secular Humanist Declaration, which attacks the New Right and the subsequent rise of political and religious intolerance.[15] The humanists reject literalist Christianity and absolutist morality, while affirming the need for moral standards based on logic and empirical experience. The statement concludes: "We are apprehensive that modern civilization is threatened by forces antithetical to reason, democracy, and freedom."

In response to the attempts of the New Right to control the content of textbooks, the National Council of Teachers of English has provided guidelines to schools for coping with censorship attacks. The efforts of the New Right, the English teachers claim, leave students with a distorted view of the ideals, values, and problems of their culture.

> The purpose of education remains what it has always been in a free society: to develop a free and reasoning human being who can think for himself, who understands his own and, to some extent, other cultures, who lives compassionately and cooperatively with his fellow man, who respects both himself and others, who has developed self-discipline and self-motivation and exercises both, who can laugh at a world which often seems mad, and who can successfully develop survival strategies for existence in that world.[16]

The American Civil Liberties Union's Coalition Against Censorship, which is sponsored by the National Council of Churches, sees the New Right's attempt to control children's reading material "as a violation of the First Amendment and of the principles of education."[17] It is wrong, the group argues, to remove a book from a pupil because an individual or an organization disapproves of the ideas in that book. "Censorship protects ignorance, not innocence."

In response to these counter-attacks, the New Right maintains that the battle over control of the schools is a conflict between absolute good (old-fashioned American values) and absolute bad (Communism). The New Right claims that the battle is beyond compromise – it must be a fight to the finish. According to some analysts, the New Right, with such an apocalyptic outlook, cannot expect to bring more moderate members into their fold. Financial problems have already plagued some New Right organizers, because they have operated on the expectation of continual growth in membership and contributions. TV evangelist Jim Bakker of the PTL Club, for example, has been forced to drop dozens of

stations that carried his program. According to William Martin of Rice University, problems like Bakker's have resulted from the fact that the total evangelical audience has not changed since 1977. New Right evangelists, Martin concludes, may have already reached a saturation point with religious broadcasting and political organizing.

Whatever the future holds for the New Right, the impact of their organization since the mid-1970s is undeniable. The school cannot escape becoming a battleground for the inevitable conflicts between the various factions. As both sides become more and more polarized, the conflicts over the schools promise to become quite bitter. The divisions within American society are quite real. If the educational establishment hopes to diffuse the coming battles, administrators, supervisors, and teachers must understand the complexity of these social breaches.

Coping With the New Right and Social Diversity

What can educators do to deal with the dilemmas posed by the New Right and other manifestations of American diversity? There are no quick fixes or panaceas. In the short run, however, educators must step back from the heightened emotionalism of the present debate and examine the premises of the New Right as they relate to the basic purpose of American education. We must study the New Right not merely as a threat to our pluralistic society but as a manifestation of American diversity. I have not written this fastback to defend the New Right and its attack on public education – far from it. I am simply proposing that the time for railing against the New Right has long past; the time for new questions about the meaning of the movement has arrived.

The questions raised by the New Right are giving educators an ideal opportunity to look at public education in America from new and different perspectives. Questions that need to be addressed by educators are:

- Who determines public school standards? Who determines if these standards are met?
- Are cultural, religious, political, or philosophical differences to be encouraged and incorporated in the public school curriculum?
- Is there ever room for true diversity in a *public* school system?
- Ultimately, who controls the education of children? Does the state's right to have an "educated" citizenry supersede parents' right to educate their children as they see fit?

It is questions like these that are being raised by the New Right's challenge to the public schools. The educational establishment must begin to examine fully the issues raised by the New Right and to answer objectively the questions posed. Until the supporters of public education analyze the educational implications of the movement in a broader perspective, they will waste their time addressing each attack as it occurs. The time has come to open a new debate.

Educators should not be afraid of this debate. Those who object to various school practices have a right to speak their minds and defend their objections. As a democratic nation, America's political and educational systems are founded on a belief in unfettered public discussion. The most effective defense against the imposition of irrational policy is public debate over the policy.

American teachers do not have to be on the defensive. They should join in the public debate and explain what they are teaching and why. Administrators must support teachers in this effort and provide them sufficient security in their jobs so that they can speak honestly in a public forum.

With the reality of American diversity, we cannot protect our children from exposure to competing values. As the debate over educational goals continues, we inevitably come back to the basic question: Should the schools transmit and reflect the shared values of society, or should they deliberately try to change the values of society? This is a difficult question, but by posing it educators help the public realize the complexity of the problem of educational purpose. When the complexity of the problem is widely understood, we can see the folly of simplistic, black-and-white answers. With extreme positions exposed, rational and productive interchange of ideas becomes possible.

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